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**Ferris State University’s new Center for Virtual Learning and Esports Arena showcases Tubelite high-performance curtainwall for high-tech building**

(May 2024) – The newly constructed, LEED-certified Center for Virtual Learning (CVL) at Ferris State University’s Big Rapids campus showcases technologically advanced classrooms, fully equipped 24-hour labs and the only purpose-built esports arena in Michigan. Opened in August 2023, the CVL offers an innovative, physical learning environment to envision and realize an interconnected virtual world.

Designed by Stantec, the architectural team specified Tubelite 400TU Therml=Block® High Performance Thermal Curtainwall as the basis of design for the CVL’s high-tech, three-story, 64,000-square-foot facility. Along with industry-leading thermal performance, Tubelite’s curtainwall met all the project’s requirements for sustainability, air, water, firestopping, acoustic, condensation resistance and structural criteria. The versatility of Tubelite’s system also helped achieve Stantec’s unique aesthetic design vision.

Vos Glass installed the Tubelite curtainwall’s 2.5-inch-wide by 6-inch-deep extruded aluminum framing to create the CVL’s rectangular openings in varied heights and spans. The vertical and horizontal framing joints are precisely aligned with the minimum tolerance to accommodate expansion and contraction while presenting a clean, modern appearance. The curtainwall provides outdoor views that keep students connected to the larger campus, as well as brings daylight into the collaborative learning spaces.

Enhancing the project’s distinctive appearance, Linetec finished Tubelite’s aluminum framing members in two colors – Arctic Ice and Grayish. Arctic Ice was selected for the majority of Tubelite curtainwall frames, such as for the first floor main entry and the third floor balcony enclosure. The Grayish color finish differentiates the curtainwall framing on the wall projections defining the second and third floors’ exteriors and adds visual interest within the overall glass and metal façade.

“Beginning on the exterior of the building and transcending through the doors are common themes, including the use of a binary materials language creating a pixelated, digital look and feel harkening to the movement and manipulation of data,” explained Stantec. “Primarily consisting of black and white fixtures, pops of color are artfully displayed through classroom carpet, signage and breakout spaces, representing moments of discovery that will be realized throughout the future of this new facility.”

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Supporting the building’s LEED certification, energy efficiency and campus-wide sustainability goals, Tubelite 400TU Therml=Block curtainwall is designed to meet or exceed International Energy Conservation Codes, state building codes and other performance test standards. For the CVL, Tubelite’s system features 1-inch insulating glass units, dual thermal strut framing and four-side pressure cap construction. To minimize unwanted heat transfer, the framing members’ interior and exterior surfaces are separated and insulated, helping maximize occupants’ comfort and minimize energy use.

Tubelite relies on Linetec as its single source solution for its finishing, thermal breaks and other value-added services – all under quality-assurance, factory-controlled conditions. For the CVL, Linetec applied durable two-coat, 70% PVDF resin-based architectural painted finishes. These coating systems meet the industry’s highest performance specification, AAMA 2605, published by the Fenestration and Glazing Industry Alliance.

As an environmentally responsible finisher, Linetec uses a 100% air capture system and a regenerative thermal oxidizer to safely contain and eliminate volatile organic compounds (VOCs) associated with solvents in liquid paint. This process is carefully managed in the Linetec facility. This prevents adverse environmental impact and alleviates concerns about VOCs at the jobsite and after the finished material is installed on the building.

Prior to installation on the CVL, Tubelite’s finished curtainwall system underwent field and preconstruction testing. This allowed Tubelite and Vos Glass to confirm installation methods and performance as specified in collaboration with the building team. General contractor Triangle Associates’ on-site work began earlier, in 2021, with the planned demolition of Vandercook Hall. Construction on the CVL progressed in phases through its substantial completion in February 2023.

A grand opening celebration was held in August 2023 where Ferris State University’s president, Bill Pink, Ph.D., recognized the contributions of Stantec, Triangle and other building team members. He described the CVL as “a building that was carefully and strategically constructed” and “focused on not only students and their advancement, but how our students advance our state and even our country.”

LaShanda Thomas, chair of Ferris State University’s Board of Trustees, added, “The Center for Virtual Learning is designed to support building a community, economy and society that invites everyone to maximize their potential toward our collective future.”

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“Realizing it is everything we hoped it would be and actually more in terms of the beauty of the space and the functionality of the space, it’s very gratifying,” noted Ferris State University’s School of Digital Media director, Glen Okonoski.

During its first academic year, the CVL offered many of Ferris State’s most in-demand, high-impact academic programs. Programs within the facility include Artificial Intelligence (AI), Data Science and Analytics, Digital Animation and Game Design, Information Security and Intelligence (ISI), Professional Esports Production, Project Management, Software Engineering, the School of Education, and Television and Digital Media Production. As Ferris State’s learning metaverse, it also serves as a home for university-wide online, digital content creation and instruction.

In January 2024, Ferris State became the first known university in the U.S. to use AI to create two virtual students. As part of the CVL’s research-based experiment, the AI students are enrolled as freshman and participate in lessons alongside human classmates. AI has an estimated 800,000 job openings in the U.S. with projections forecasted to be over 2 million by 2026.

Cybersecurity has more than 750,000 openings nationwide. At the CVL, students working cyber security and ways to deter malware have use of a super-secure faraday room, the nation’s first of its kind for academic purposes. Ferris State has an Education Partnership Agreement with the National Security Agency (NSA) and its ISI program is accredited by the NSA as a Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense.

At the center of the CVL, the state-of-the-art esports arena allows for coaching, training and hosting up to 18 participating teams and spectators. Ferris State has one of the top esports teams in the nation and collaborates with leading game producers. In February 2024, it welcomed the best teams in the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference’s Esports Championships. More than 240 colleges and universities currently are fielding esports teams with more than 5,000 student participants.

Ferris State University’s course pro and esports coordinator, Jono Eaton, said, “The Center for Virtual Learning really puts Ferris students at the forefront of the industry… We get to be on that cutting edge, giving our students opportunities here at Ferris.”

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***Ferris State University, Center for Virtual Learning and Esports Arena, 1009 South State St., Big Rapids, MI 49307; https://www.ferris.edu/map/center-for-virtual-learning/homepage.htm***

* Owner: Ferris State University; Big Rapids, Michigan; https://www.ferris.edu
* Architect: Stantec; Detroit; https://www.stantec.com
* General contractor: Triangle Associates; Grand Rapids, Michigan; https://www.triangle-inc.com
* Glazing systems – installing contractor: Vos Glass; Grand Rapids, Michigan; https://www.vosglass.com
* Glazing systems – aluminum framing systems manufacturer: Tubelite; Walker, Michigan; https://tubeliteusa.com
* Aluminum framing systems – finishing services provider: Linetec; Wausau, Wisconsin; https://linetec.com
* Photos by: Jeff Veltman, Vos Glass
* Videos, Ferris State University:

Timelapse, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZqpZE4\_gEQ

Preview, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPqLX0WhSgo

Grand opening highlights, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arEEJT0oRaM

Grand opening, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuU3JFL\_-CA

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